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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 002033

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SUBJECT: RACE TIGHTENS IN CLOSING WEEKS

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Classified By: Political Counselor Mary T. Curtin for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. With elections in three weeks, the Kaczynski political machine is humming, effectively sidelining its main opposition and counting on its strength in rural areas to deliver what would be an electoral first in post-communist Poland: re-election. The Kaczynskis have managed to set the pace and content of the campaign, running on the same issues that brought them to office in 2005: fighting corruption, promoting conservative moral values and playing on the notion that their Law and Justice (PiS) party alone cares for "average Poles." The opposition is running a lackluster campaign, and has failed entirely to gain traction despite the chaotic two years' of Kaczynski rule. The key to success will be turnout. With the nation neatly polarized between rural support for PiS and urban support squarely for the opposition, it will all come down to who bothers to make it to the polls on October 21. End Summary

Kaczynski Replays 2005 Themes

12. (U) With less than three weeks to go before the October 21 parliamentary elections, PM Kaczynski has set the tone and pace of the race, urging Poles to support PiS in its quest for re-election -- a potential first in post-communist Poland -- and saying that PiS alone is willing to "liquidate corruption." PiS campaign materials draw heavily on this theme, playing off of the corruption scandal involving former Interior Minister Kaczmarek and the promised detention of Ryszard Krauze, one of Poland's wealthiest entrepreneurs, who remains abroad in order to avoid arrest. The Kaczynskis are counting on their "zero tolerance" campaign to resonate with their core electorate, notably in the countryside where distrust of urban elites runs deep.

13. (C) With the elections squarely in his focus, PM Kaczynski's abrupt refusal on September 21 to invite OSCE election monitors to Poland plays directly to the Polish heartland that his government alone will defend Poland against those who wish to malign it. Despite widespread criticism both in Poland and abroad, PiS officials lined up squarely to defend Poland's democratic credentials, and the government is reluctantly revisiting the issue only after further contemplation of its potentially damaging precedent (particularly in the run up to Russian elections in December) and after the OSCE announced monitoring missions to Switzerland on the same day as Poland votes.

Tusk is Effectively Sidelined

14. (C) With great fanfare PM Kaczynski accepted a challenge to debate former President Aleksandr Kwasniewski, who is

leading the campaign for the reconstituted Left and Democrats (LiD). That debate will take place this evening, with a focus on foreign policy. Kaczynski is openly pleased to replay the 2005 election when PiS soundly beat the scandal-ridden government led by Kwasniewski's party, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) (which dominates the LiD coalition) and dismisses Civic Platform (PO) leader Donald Tusk as "Kwasniewski's assistant." Kaczynski later said he was willing to debate Tusk, but only on the condition that PO would disavow in writing any possible governing coalition with LiD. Tusk continues a bewildering strategy of simply not responding to the taunts, in fact not saying much of anything at all for fear of alienating potential voters. Tusk confidant Slawomir Rybicki told poloff on September 25 that he was worried that PiS had grabbed the momentum and that PO was facing defeat. The resulting silence from PO leads many to believe Donald Tusk will in fact manage to squander PO's consistent lead and lose yet another election. That plays into PiS strategy that a first place showing for PiS on October 21 will force PO into a coalition -- and possibly force Tusk out -- although the Kaczynskis' track record with coalition partners is poor. Losing but opting to sit out could force a bruised PO to fall apart. With former PO leader Jan Rokita's wife, Nelly Rokita, now an advisor to President Kaczynski and running for parliament from Warsaw's PiS list, there is little question but that her husband is likely to follow.

Coalitions of the Willing

15. (C) Latest polls show that despite its meager effort, PO is running neck and neck with PiS, at around 30% each, making virtually any coalition combination possible. If PiS wins, but cannot woo PO into a grand center-right coalition, then it may be able to form a majority government with the Peasants Party (PSL). PSL perennially plays the role of

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potential kingmaker, and has been approached and then dismissed repeatedly by the Kaczynskis. PO may have more partners lining up, including PSL, LiD or even a PO-led coalition with PiS. Nonetheless, a coalition with the former Communists may be a bridge too far for many in PO, which was formed in reaction to the perpetual scandals of the SLD government. One mid-level PO oriented professional told us he might not vote for PO because he was so firmly opposed to a potential PO coalition with the still-corrupt SLD. Wiser heads in PO recognize that, should PiS win, accepting a junior position to PiS only promises further coalition theatrics, akin to what has played out between PiS and the League of Polish Families (LPR) and Samoobrona (SO).

It all comes down to Turnout

16. (C) Comment. With the two leading parties evenly matched, the election will be won on the basis of turnout, including among expatriate Poles whose votes are clustered together in one Warsaw district where PM Kaczynski will square off against PO's Donald Tusk. That race is so important that campaigning in "Polonia," took President Kaczynski on a side trip to Chicago last week, and Tusk to London and Dublin this weekend to woo the younger, and presumably more PO-oriented potential votes there. Radio Maryja's notorious founder, Father Rydzyk, has been notably quiet, although he has featured PiS politicians who hammer on listeners to support PM Kaczynski. We cannot imagine he will stay silent long, since Rydzyk will seek to characterize a possible PiS win as his doing. In contrast, cellphone users in urban Poland are swapping text messages that urge urbanites to swipe the identification cards and mohair berets of their grandmothers, to try to minimize the influence of Rydzyk's conservative followers. In order to wrest control from the Kaczynskis, the opposition will have to do more than send SMS messages; they will have to convince their core

constituents, middle-class, well-educated, urban Poles, to
put down their lattes long enough to get to the polls. End
Comment.

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